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"September Morn"

Paul Chabas' Famous Work—the Most Discussed Painting of Recent Years

Is This Picture

"A Glorious Work of Art Chastely Portraying the Loveliest Dream Nature Ever Made Real" and Fit for the Admiration of Any Lover of the Beautiful—

Or Is It

As Some of America's "Mock Immoralists" Maintain, a Shocking Example of French Immodesty Which Should Be Barred from the Public Gaze in the Interests of Decency and the Children?

ARE we a nation of prurient prudes, mock moralists and tasteless barbarians?

That is the question that has been raised by the assault made in New York upon Paul Chabas' painting of the nude, "September Morn."

The episode has been used to cast discredit upon our taste and moral standards in Europe, and many cultured Americans indignantly share the European view. On the other hand, there are undoubtedly respectable Americans who hold that the picture is demoralizing, and have no sympathy with the artistic viewpoint.

This newspaper has interviewed a long list of intellectually representative Americans and found few who did not praise the picture warmly.

The painting represents a young girl, little more than a child, bathing in a lake in September. She is drawing herself together with an attitude natural to one who feels chilly. She is entirely nude, and the girlish figure is beautifully drawn. It requires a powerful imagination to find anything suggestive in the work.

Those who condemn the picture are opposed to all representations of the nude, but, in addition, they see something particularly objectionable in the crouching attitude of the figure in this case. Artists and the majority of broad-minded persons see in it only the natural action of a human being feeling a slight chill, but the puritans are strangely excited by it. This is the point on which the more intelligent critics centre their criticism. They allege that it is not a simple picture of the nude, but an alluring suggestion of concealment. The answer to this is that such a view shows a distorted mind that seeks to discover evil in everything.

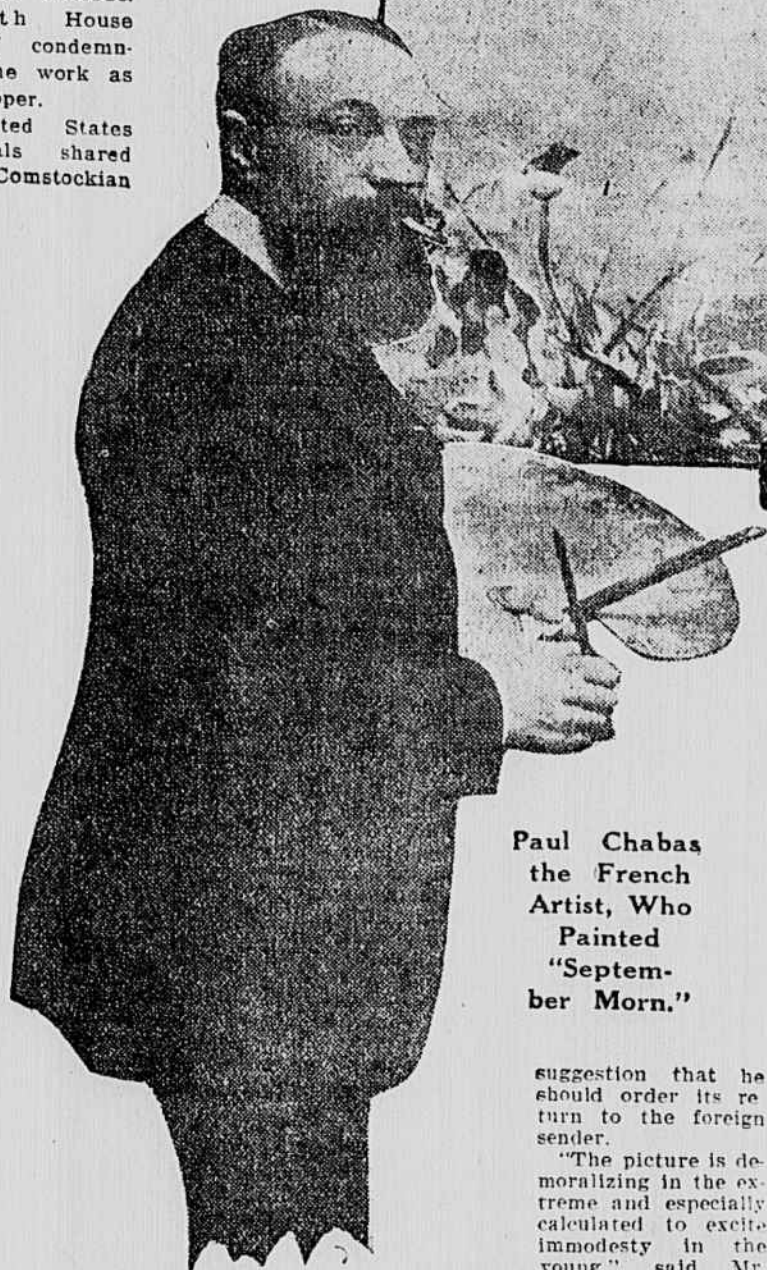
The painting won a gold medal at the Paris Salon and was bought by a rich Russian resident of Paris. The artist had refused to sell it to an American lest it be taken out of the country. A fine print of the picture was, however, exhibited in an art store in New York.

Anthony Comstock, the professional vice crusader, ordered the picture removed. The art dealer refused, and when Mr. Comstock appealed for an order to remove it from a court he was not sustained.

In Chicago the police ordered the print removed from a window, an incident that is interesting as showing that Comstock was not alone in his attitude.

"Bath House John" condemned the work as improper.

United States officials shared the Comstockian



Paul Chabas
the French
Artist, Who
Painted
"September
Morn."

suggestion that he should order its return to the foreign sender.

"The picture is demoralizing in the extreme and especially calculated to excite immodesty in the young," said Mr. Comstock. "The human figure should never be displayed in public without proper clothing. We must save the children from such sights."

As against Mr. Comstock's view here is what Miss Inez Milholland, the New York suffragist leader, a thoroughly representative young woman, said:

"The picture is exquisite and delicate, depicting perfect youth and

innocence. That any one should wish to banish it is incomprehensible. I should be ashamed to admit that such a point of view is American. That 'September Morn' should be asked to move on and some shocking, horrible theatrical posters allowed to remain would be funny if it were not so sad."

Rose Pastor Stokes, the East Side working girl who married J. G. Phelps Stokes, a member of a millionaire family, and now lives with her husband among her people, spoke enthusiastically for the picture:

"September Morn" is a glorious work of art, portraying the loveliest dream that nature ever made real—the human Body Beautiful.

"The Body Beautiful is as sweet and pure and sacred a thing as the

Soul Beautiful. If the youth of our land are not aware of this fact—if, standing before the rare portrayal of the Body Beautiful in 'September Morn' they are not elevated, do not regard their own bodies and the bodies of others with a purer reverence, but, on the contrary, are caused to feel ashamed of their bodies and the bodies of others, the fault lies not with the perfect picture, but with a false and most imperfect education, and our business is not to condemn the artist and his work, but the educators and their work."

Even if our educational system has succeeded in leaving not one clean-minded youth in the land, it seems to me more wholesome to meet the shame that lies in an unclean state of mind with frankness than to meet it with pure hypocrisy."

It is only just to say that there are Americans more cultured than Anthony Comstock who question the propriety of displaying the picture in public. This type of opinion is well represented by the Rev. Sydney N. Cusher, associate rector of St. Bartholomew's Church, a very fashionable New York Episcopal congregation. He said:

"There is no doubt that there is a different standard of morality abroad from what we have in America in questions of art. The humiliating reason is, we must admit, that the average American understands and appreciates real art far less than the average European."

"Inasmuch as America can never become eminently a nation of art-lovers, because realism is here too strongly opposed to idealism, I would not recommend so vivid an example of nudity as 'September Morn' for public exhibition. I am sure the great majority of observers would not be inclined to take the right viewpoint."

James Montgomery Flagg, probably the most popular black-and-white artist in America and a social caricaturist of great ability, expressed the feelings of his craft when he said:

"There is something the matter with the brain of a man who gives his time to seeking the prurient. Only a diseased mind can find anything immoral in 'September Morn.' A young girl is preparing to take a bath in the lake, and the cold water

makes natural a gesture of fear. The crouching Venus is in the same position."

"Anglo-Saxons are a race of hypocrites. Mayor Gaynor represents one variety of our hypocrisy when he talks about 'outward decency.' He has the viewpoint of the slovenly chambermaid who sweeps the dirt under the bed."

"Americans strain at a moral gnat and swallow a camel. There is no country where divorce is so speedy and remarriage so precipitate as here."

Judge Wauhope Lynn, the distinguished jurist, a popular leader among warm-hearted Irishmen, defended the picture heartily:

"I don't think you can justly judge the American attitude toward art by Anthony Comstock. I have known Tony for thirty years. At the beginning of that time people thought they should do away with offensive writing and signs on fences and in other public places, and they set Tony to do the work. But now he is going outside his province."

"Prison officials will not allow the picture of any woman, even a saint, in a prisoner's cell. They may be right, but we must not assume that our ordinary citizens have the morality of convicts. We cannot abolish women because some men are abnormal."

"I wish there could be a picture like 'September Morn' in every show window in town. People who are used to the sight of the natural human body are never corrupt. The Puritans cased their women as with armor from head to toe, and they were whited sepulchres. We are reacting from that sort of thing, and that is why men find the slit skirt interesting."

Richard Bennett, the actor, has been playing the leading role in "Damaged Goods," a play which, though dealing with a repulsive subject, is warmly commended by good men and women. In discussing the picture Mr. Bennett remarked cleverly:

"Chabas' 'September Morn' is no more immoral than the lovely morning would be without the figure of the girl in the waters of the lake."

Dr. Homer Gibney, the noted New York surgeon, who approaches the question from a unique standpoint because his professional work has

consisted largely of correcting bodily deformities, can see nothing but beauty in this picture.

"If I had a daughter," he said, "this picture is the kind of decoration I would like to see on her wall, and if I had a son I should be happy to have him feast his eyes on it every day. It shows the beauty of the human form as nature intended it to be. It cannot but inspire higher emotions in any but the degenerate, and fortunately the degenerate class represents but a very small minority of the American nation. To see the beautiful purifies the emotions, gives one an aesthetic bath, so to speak, and psychologically such a bath is valuable."

Abraham Cahan, editor of the Jewish Daily Forward, the New York Jewish newspaper which represents the most advanced socialistic ideas, is in entire accord with those who uphold the rights of honest, sincere art.

"We could print Chabas' picture in our paper, and it would do good rather than harm," he said. "Some people are so constituted that a beautiful picture like this conveys nothing but smutty suggestions to them. People of that type scarcely hear an ordinary English word without interpreting it in some indecent manner. They are to be classed with degenerates."

"This picture is the very embodiment of beauty and purity. It uplifts the mind instead of dragging it down to the mire of obscenity. One must possess a very low psychology indeed to construe this beautiful thing into something suggestive of lewdness."

Lady Constance Stewart Richardson was the one person interviewed not American. She is an authority because her artistic specialty consists of barefooted dancing.

"To regard the nude body from a sex point of view is a sin," said Lady Constance. "But it is a sin rather on the part of the parents than on the part of the children. It is all a question of education, a subject in which I am deeply interested. Children should be accustomed to see but slightly clad and beautiful bodies from the beginning of their lives, and the usefulness of such a sight would remove all suggestion from it."

Miss Mary Shaw, the actress, considered the best interpreter of Ibsen's female roles, said:

"Americans lack an artistic conscience. They have not the courage to stand alone for an opinion."

"A few years ago I was arrested for playing the woman's role in 'Mrs. Warren's Profession,' by Bernard Shaw. When the play was sanctioned by law those who had been busiest in slandering it were the most eager to see it."

"Private pleasures, not public scandals, is the American motto. In Continental Europe they are braver in life and art."

David Belasco, the masterly constructor of stage spectacles, spoke warmly for the picture:

"The presentation of this shy little maiden bathing in the coolness of a lovely September morn can conjure in the imagination no sensation save that of a recognition of her own childlike innocence. To be privileged a view of innocence such as this is ennobling, whether we see it in the picture or in real life."

American Girls "Beautiful;" London's "Dowdy;" Australia's "Venuses"

NOTHING like a girl to put other girls in their place!

One observing girl who has taken that task upon herself is an Australian, who writes under the name of Dulcie Deamer. Having completed her observations of New York girls, she has sailed back to London. From there she will hurry home to Australia—after analyzing the charms and defects of the girls of most of the European capitals.

Before sailing from New York, Dulcie Deamer epitomized her girl impressions for the benefit of readers of this newspaper.

"The American girls are beautiful," she said. "The London girls are positively dowdy. And now I'll share my most important discovery with you. If you want to see Venus on her native beach, you must go to Australia. There is no doubt about that. Can you blame me for hurrying home?"

More in detail, the pretty Australian said: "Where Paris offers chic, seductive fashion-plates, London offers homely dowds. I was never in any city where ordinary feminine good looks were so conspicuous by their absence. If one should accept the standard of the London streets as typical for the whole of Britain, one would be forced to conclude that the great majority of English women are plain, commonplace, and shockingly badly dressed."

"The London woman who most persistently assailed my observation is usually shortish;

her figure is inoffensive, and it is not the kind which is evolved by the directoire corset; her complexion is her own, and her clothes are coverings. Every woman knows what that distinction means. She badly needs an Australian friend to teach her how to dress."

"The New York girl is beautiful. Never have I visited a city where the beauty average for all classes of women was so high. A really plain girl is almost as rare there as an ichthyosaurus."

"The typical New York girl is of medium height—in fact, more often short than tall—with a pretty figure, a good carriage, the smallest foot in the world, I honestly believe; perfect taste and style as regards dress, exquisitely manicured hands, brunette coloring, a very pretty face—and an expression as hard as a piece of road metal."

"The female New Yorker is about the hardest thing on earth—granite, paving stone, home-made stones and adamant not being excepted. . . . She is not a woman; she is a cold-blooded bandit, with a calculating eye extracting jewelry, theatre tickets, expensive restaurant meals and automobile rides from her circle of male acquaintances. She has no use at all for any man who cannot 'show her a good time'—and how any man in full possession of his senses can have any use for her is more than I can comprehend."

"Never in my life have I watched so many vivid girls and women as in the city by the

Saine—girls and women who grip one's attention as with eager, nervous hands."

"These girls are mostly dark—dark as Circe—and the long, shameless, man-entrancing eyes of the classic seductress haunt and fascinate one up and down the length of every boulevard. They possess a feline grace of movement, and the slim shape of them suggests a sylph in a directoire corset—if one can imagine such a combination. And they know how to dress—with one exception. That exception is their feet, which, to put it mildly, do not, as a rule, carry out the sylph simile. I have seen sartorial creations so much 'up to the moment' that they were well ahead of Green-wich time, and looking like a cross between a day dream and a nightmare, being carried around by a pair of shabby, squashed, trodden-down shoes which the average Australian girl would shudder at."

"The Parisienne of this intentionally conspicuous type is sex-conscious to such an abnormal extent that it gets on one's nerves. This same constitutes a certain decadent but potent fascination, exotic, hectic, and supremely unwholesome."

"But in Australia our beautiful girls are not only Venuses in face and form; they are exquisite in their taste for dress and personal adornment; and, far from being hard and calculating, they are sympathetic, human. If New York girls would lose their calculating, hardness they would come nearer than any other to the Australian Venus."